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ABSTRACT

Various aspects of nonverbal communication are discussed in this paper, and the questions of how and why to teach it are considered. It is suggested that the nonverbal field can be roughly divided into three domains, in terms of method and the nature of the questions asked. Albert Scheflen and several other "nonverbal structuralists" are interested in studying whole communication systems, to see how all communicational elements--verbal and nonverbal--are coordinated. The external variable approach (Duncan 1969) investigates systematic relationships between nonverbal behavior and something else: psychological states, perception of meaning, or interpersonal outcomes. A third kind of research related to the study of personality is concerned with individual differences in nonverbal behavior. Some of the research related to nonverbal communication is summarized, and ethical problems associated with analyses of nonverbal communication are briefly discussed. (LL)

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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

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It is not very hard to say what nonverbal communication is. It is communication without words, or beyond words; it is communication through facial expressions, hand, limb, and body movements, body postures, rhythm of movement, muscle tension; through gaze direction and changes in pupil size; through voice tone, accent, voice rhythm, vocal patterning (i.e., interruptions in conversation, pauses, speech duration, speech errors); through dress, makeup, and hair style; through interpersonal spacing, interpersonal touching; through smell, even through taste.

Even in the ostensibly verbal channel of communication, there is nonverbal communication; this is called metacommunication--communication about communication. The speaker or writer may or may not be aware of this level of communication. When we "read between the lines," we are engaging in an effort to read someone's metacommunicational messages. Take a person who is stopping smoking and warns everyone that he's going to be crabby. At one level, he's doing his friends a favor by preparing them; at another level (the metacommunicational level), he is telling them it is illegitimate for them to apply normal standards of conduct to him. He is saying, "You are not free to criticize me even if I am inconsiderate." Metacommunication has received a great deal of theoretical and some empirical attention in psychology since the 1956 publication of Gregory Bateson's and his colleagues' article, "Towards a Theory of Schizophrenia," in which the theory of the "double bind" was laid out. Conflicting cues and metacommunication are the main ingredients in this theory. But that is all I shall say about metacommunication, since most nonverbal researchers stick to kinds of communication that are easier to objectify, operationalize, and to quantify.

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But this list of "channels" of nonverbal communication doesn't tell us very much. The two more difficult questions are "How do we go about studying nonverbal communication, and why do we want to study it?". The question of how we study nonverbal communication is both a technical one and a theoretical one, theoretical in the sense that we can operate at various levels of analysis, the level being determined by the kind of question we want to ask.

We can examine nonverbal behavior at the level of the individual person (for example, does John have a compulsion to brush lint off himself when he thinks about topics that are distasteful to him?), or we can try to make probabilistic predictions about a particular person on the basis of what we have generalized from looking at many people (for example, the person sitting at the head of a table may be accorded more deference and respect than those sitting along the sides and thus may become a leader over the course of time).

We can examine nonverbal behavior at the level of groups of two or more persons (how does their nonverbal behavior affect each other, or their collective outcomes?); and also at the level of the subculture or culture (does a certain kind of smile mean one thing in Japan and another in the U. S.? Or, to cite a famous anecdote, does the Arab proclivity for conversing at physically closer distances than Americans lead to strained international relations because the Arab diplomat approaches closer to establish his most comfortable conversing distance, while the American diplomat backs off to establish <u>his</u> most comfortable conversing distance?).

The nonverbal field can be roughly divided into three domains in terms of method and the nature of the questions asked. If we are interested in understanding the structure of communication--the rules of the game, as it were--then we might study a particular episode of nonverbal interaction with great care, just as a linguist studies particular episodes of verbal behavior with great care. Albert Scheflen and several other nonverbal "structuralists" are interested in studying whole communicational systems, to see how all com-

munications elements--verbal and nonverbal--are coordinated. What are the rules of "punctuation" in interpersonal communication? What are the nonverbal traffic signals that we use, mostly unconsciously, to regulate the flow of words and acts and to modify and qualify the meanings of words and acts?

This so-called "structural" approach is mostly descriptive and observational; it tells what happens in particular episodes of interaction and it tries to generalize to other episodes of the same sort (though this can be a problem, which I won't go into now). The major thrust of the structuralists' position is that nonverbal "language" is learned early and is largely culturally determined and shared among members of a culture, and that a great deal of what transpires between individuals and groups is predetermined, even ritual-like, in its regularity. People order their behavior according to an incredibly complex, shared, and largely unconscious set of rules and conventions.

Another approach, one more akin to social psychology than to linguistics or anthropology, is called by Duncan (1969) the "external variable" approach. Researchers look for systematic relationships between nonverbal behavior and something else: psychological states, the perception of meaning, or interpersonal outcomes. For example, what kinds of information can be communicated nonverbally in various channels? Do the sexes differ in their nonverbal behavior or in their sensitivity to nonverbal cues? Does the pitch of a person's voice tell you what emotion the person is experiencing? Are you perceived as more powerful if you look away from someone while that person is talking than if you don't? Methodologically, this approach often involves real or quasi-experiments, that is, situations in which you ask "what would happen if ... ?", and typically involves groups of participants from whom you collect your data in the form of observations, measurements, and the like. The results of this kind of research are often potentially or actually useful, in addition to being interesting (we're assuming all nonverbal research

is interesting).

A third kind of research is more closely related to the study of personality than to social psychology, though the distinction is somewhat artificial. In this approach we are concerned with individual differences in nonverbal behavior. (Social psychologists, in searching for regularities in human behavior, often have to proceed as though individual differences don't exist--or, to be more precise, as though they can't be measured.) A relatively small number of nonverbal researchers do try to measure individual differences. For example, some (me among them) try to measure people's abilities to convey or to judge nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, body movements, and tone of voice, and then try to find out whether such skill or lack of skill makes any difference in the people's lives. Is a person who is excellent at judging or sending nonverbal cues more likely to be popular? have a better job? do better at his or her job? be a good actor or artist? be brighter? be more socially adjusted or more psychologically healthy? be less susceptible to other people's attempts to influence them? be better able to influence others? be more Machiavelliam? more altruistic? be better teachers or clinicians? Do people know how nonverbally skilled they are, and can their skill be increased? This line of research also has potential usefulness: we might want to select people for certain jobs on the basis of their nonverbal skills, or we might want to try to train people to improve the skills they need most for certain situations. We might even want to incorporate some kind of nonverbal training into our educational programs for children.

Now comes the most difficult question (but not the most frequently

asked question) for psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and all the others doing nonverbal research: what, ultimately, are our goals in studying nonverbal communication? Here is my view. We partly want to learn about it because we have naive curiosity about mysterious phenomena. But we also have a strong intuition that nonverbal communication matters enormously in our lives, in our jobs and marriages, in international relations, in race relations, in the cohesion or collapse of institutions and societies, in mental health and education. So we also hope to be able to alleviate some of our woes if we can better understand our "messages of the body" (that's the title of a recent book). But, we are also self-serving creatures, and we intuit that if we can bring to consciousness our own "non-verbals" we can exercise more personal and interpersonal control; if we can "read" the unintended (or intended, for that matter) nonverbals of others, we'll understand them better than they understand themselves (which is to our advantage).

It is interesting to note that most scholarly research that I know of deals with unintended nonverbal communication, even though a lot of nonverbal communication isn't unintended at all. Here are some examples of work on unintended communication. Robert Rosenthal and others have studied the "self-fulfilling prophecy," or the way in which one person's expectations are communicated innocently and unknowingly by psychologists to the human participants in their experiments, by teachers to their pupils, and probably by parents, and all of us, constantly.

Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen as well as Robert Krauss and others have studied deception and the extent to which nonverbal "leakage" gives away the deceiver--"leakage" being the emission of nonverbal cues without one's knowledge. As Freud said, "He that has eyes to see and ears to

hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore."

Krauss and his colleagues recently found that deception carried out over the telephone was easier to detect from listening to the voice of the speaker than was face-to-face deception; but, in addition, when you are deceiving someone over the phone, your facial expressions and body expressions give you away easily, if anyone happens to be watching, presumably because you are not monitoring your behaviors in those channels. In a face-to-face deception you bother to control your face and body, making detection much more difficult. Ekman and Friesen have found that people's body movements tended to betray them while they were decieving more than their faces did. And both Krauss and Ekman have found a rise in the fundamental pitch of the voice to be associated with deception.

Daphne Bugental and her colleagues have studied effects of discrepant nonverbal cues--for example, mothers of psychotic children tended to send more contradictory cues in the verbal versus tone channels than did mothers of well children. She also found that people who were low in their sense of being in control of their own lives tended, when interacting with others, to be very assertive in their choice of words but very unassertive in their voice tone; the voice tone "leaked" the person's "true" lack of confidence in his own ability to influence others.

At this stage researchers have done little in the way of studying applications of knowledge obtained through nonverbal research. (A nota-

ble exception is the recent work of Ekman and Friesen on teaching people to both recognize facially expressed emotions and to monitor and control their own facial expressions.) Lack of practical research may be because we are just not confident enough about what we know to be ready to apply it, or because psychologists are generally opposed to practical research, or it may also be because we are fearful of being guilty of developing tools that can be easily misused.

I will say ~~Finally,~~ a few words about one direction that may have few ethical problems associated with it. That concerns the study of nonverbal skill--ability to send or judge nonverbal cues. I mentioned this earlier. This research, which I have been carrying out with Robert Rosenthal and others, was inspired by earlier work on self-fulfilling prophecies. The communication of interpersonal expectancies is apparently mediated nonverbally. Many researchers have looked at what kinds of cues are emitted by, for example, teachers toward those pupils for whom they have high or low expectations. Robert Rosenthal has also proposed that in addition to studying what cues are sent in such situations, we should study how these cues are conveyed and judged: more specifically, do teachers vary in how well or poorly they communicate their expectations? And are these cues picked up consistently or are there individual differences in pupils' sensitivity to nonverbal cues? He proposed that when one person is a good "sender" and the other a good "receiver" or judge, self-fulfilling prophecies should be more likely to happen, especially if these matching skills are in the same channel and the ~~redun-~~ relevant ~~dant cases~~ cues are sent through that channel. Recently we did a study involving experimenters and subjects in a psychological experiment, and

we found this prediction to be supported. When the experimenter was a good nonverbal sender and the subject a good nonverbal receiver, the experimenter's expectations for the subjects' performance were most likely to be communicated and acted on by the subject (unbeknownst to either of them I should add).

Actually, little else is known about the relation of nonverbal communication skill to social influence. We are currently planning and doing research to try to learn more about the role that ability to send and judge cues plays in social skill, for example (to list some social skills named by Michael Argyle in his book The Psychology of Interpersonal Behavior): conveying information (as in teaching), obtaining information (as in interviewing), changing people's attitudes or beliefs (as in selling or persuading), changing the emotional state of another (as in cheering someone up or dealing with a hostile person), changing another's personality (as in psychotherapy or child-rearing), working cooperatively, and supervising the activities of others.

In a recent study of mine, contrary to the predictions made before the study was done, persons of a so-called "feminine" temperament--gentle, emotional, attuned to others' feelings and needs--were not the most accurate judges of nonverbal cues. Rather, persons of a more "masculine" temperament were--people who were more aggressive, dominant, self-confident, and independent. Maybe nonverbal skill matters most in situations in which there is a lot at stake if one misreads others--as in task situations or competitive situations. In addition, the more "chauvenized" types of women--women with an anti-feminist ideology, with traditional preferences for

husband and wife roles, and who performed the greatest proportion of the most demeaning household chores (cleaning and laundry) were less nonverbally sensitive than women who were more "liberated" in their values and behaviors. Does the ability to read others' nonverbal communication help you in some way to avert being oppressed, I wonder: maybe a more acute ability enables you to recognize when you are being "put down" or manipulated.

If this is so then ~~we might find that~~ although more nonverbally sensitive people ~~are~~ may be more easily influenced when the cues are subtle or unintentional, ~~but~~ they may be harder to influence when the cues are more flagrant. They may recognize the influence attempt for what it is and resist.

So, where are we? Will we be sorry for trying to expose the mysteries of nonverbal communication? Maybe our efforts will just contribute to the further de-authentication of our society. We are already in the "canned" phase of our culture's development. Will we someday be marketing behavior sequence packages designed to bring about almost any interpersonal result we want? I doubt it; luckily human beings are so complex that it would be too hard to make predictions about how others will respond to our behavior that are both simple, universally applicable, and also true and reliable. There would be too many if's and only's to make such endeavors worthwhile. Our intuitions probably are better than any simple formulas.

Nevertheless, I am sure you have seen such popular books as Body Language, Body Talk, How to Read a Person Like a Book, Winning through Intimidation, and others. These books exploit our ignorance and our curiosity about why relationships succeed and fail and they feed our needs to exercise social control--by telling us how to orchestrate our own "body language" and to read other people's true feelings from their "body language." Here are some recommendations drawn directly from these books: A business customer is interested in your product if his pupils dilate, or if he sits in a certian posture. A potential customer can be put at a disadvantage if you take him to a restaurant and then gradually move your water glass and silverware onto his side of the table; by so doing, you encroach on his territory, making him anxious and defensive. To assert dominance or superiority over someone, all you have to do is physically elevate yourself above him. You can also dominate under the guise of communicating intimacy and confidentiality, by speaking softly at a very close distance (this subordinates the other person).

You can make a fellow student uncomfortable and eventually force him to flee, by sitting too close in a library. To act like a boss, just enter the subordinate's (or the would-be subordinate's) office without

knocking. To attract a man at a party, just imitate his body positions, thus producing what some researchers call interactional synchrony. A man can invade a woman's personal space at a party, gradually "so his quarry won't know what's happening until she's hooked on his appeal." And so on.

These exploitive recommendations are not all based on documented facts, of course, which means that the advice may not work. But just think how much more powerful such tricks will be when they are based on "scientific" evidence! This is a problem that should not be belittled by psychologists.

One can argue that we intuitively understand nonverbal communication, and so what we learn about nonverbal communication through research is not likely to make us want to change our behavior radically. I don't believe that. I think a lot of what is being learned is nonobvious. In addition, even the intuitively obvious findings gain the weight of scientific legitimacy, which makes the audience much more believing. Already, the subtitle of the worst one of the "pop" books is "The Science of Kinesics."

I do gain some hope, though, from ~~the irony~~ a contradiction implicit in the assumptions of the "pop" nonverbal books. One of their absolutely key assumptions is that most of people's nonverbal cues, those that are out of awareness at least, are "truer" than what people say or what they actually try to communicate nonverbally. However, these books are not only guides to reading others' secrets, but are also manuals of body language fakery. In other words they tell the reader that he or she

can do what others can't do--to control one's own nonverbal behavior so as to create any impression one wants.

And to be even more optimistic, it may be that if we are all more aware of the meanings or at least of the importance of nonverbal messages, we might be better able to defend ourselves against those who do want to control or exploit us.